FY 2006 ARMY FAMILY ACTION PLAN (A.F.A.P.) CONFERENCE OUT BRIEF

CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

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FORT CARSON A.F.A.P.

Top Three Services

1. *Health Services* **(Tied)**
1. *DMWR* **(Tied)**
2. *Commissary*
3. *AAFES*

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DMWR Consumer Affairs

Childcare Affordability

SCOPE: Current childcare costs exceed the average military family's' budget, causing undue financial hardship. Military family's income is affected by circumstances beyond the service members control (i.e. sudden and unexpected cost of living increases). The lack of affordable childcare results in the use of substandard or uncertified childcare services or a violation of the installation policy for supervision of children.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Further subsidize childcare centers and family childcare homes to offset childcare expenses.
2. Establish single parent discounts.
3. Modify the current multiple child discount to increase with each additional child in care.

Tuition Assistance for Military Spouses

SCOPE: Currently, there is no tuition assistance for military spouses comparable to active duty service members' tuition assistance. Post secondary education will better equip military spouses to obtain jobs that will enable them to better support their families. However, the cost of continuing education is often too expensive for the average military family. Spouse tuition assistance will promote retention by increasing the quality of life and reducing financial hardships.

RECOMMENDATION: Provide funding for a military spouse tuition assistance program equivalent to active duty service member tuition assistance.

Insufficient on Post Temporary Lodging for Soldiers and Families with Pets

SCOPE: Currently, there are only four rooms that are available for pets in temporary lodging. Consequently, families have to make the decision to stay off post in order to keep pets with families during transitional moves, creating an inconvenience and undo stress on families and pets.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Increase availability of adequate on post temporary lodging for Soldiers and families with pets.
2. Establish an Army standard for providing on post temporary lodging rooms supporting service members and families with pets.

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Health Services

Resolution of Patient TRICARE Issues at the Local Level

SCOPE: TRICARE beneficiaries are unable to resolve issues at the local level.

The local TRICARE service center is limited to enrollment and registration. They

are not authorized to resolve claim issues and approve referrals. The TRICARE

1-800 number does not resolve patient issues in a timely manner. The current

process creates patient frustrations and delay of care.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Change present or next contact and restore authority to local TRICARE service center to resolve patient issues.
2. Allow local military treatment facility (MTF) staff to have direct communication with TRICARE.

Comprehensive Vision Plan Available to Beneficiaries

SCOPE: TRICARE does not have a comprehensive vision plan for beneficiaries. High cost of vision care places a financial burden on Army families. The current Benefit only covers one annual eye exam. Families are paying the full cost for glasses, contacts, and lasik surgery.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Implement a comprehensive vision plan for beneficiaries that covers supplemental eye care services over and beyond the annual eye exam.
2. Fund a portion of the plan under TRICARE.

Dental Plan Coverage for Family Members and Retirees

SCOPE: The current dental plan does not sufficiently cover routine dental procedures. Rising dental expenses are above the current $1000 cap and 60%-40% insurance co-pay are not sufficient to relieve financial burden. Routine dental procedures are a quality of life necessity which are not being received due to the cost constraints.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Keep the preventive and diagnostic service coverage at 100%.
2. Increase the annual maximum coverage on non-orthodontic services to $4,500.
3. Increase all other dental service coverage to 80% insurance and a 20% co-pay.

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Family Support/ Volunteers/ Employment

Installation Management Agency (IMA) Funding for Army Family Team Building (A.F.T.B.)/ Army Family Action Plan (A.F.A.P.)

SCOPE: IMA funding excludes A.F.T.B./A.F.A.P., which forces garrison commands to reallocate budgeted dollars. The quality of life for the "total Army family" significantly depends of the full funding of these vital programs. Without IMA funding A.F.T.B./A.F.A.P. --- the foundation of a proactive approach to empowering military families --- the Army will return to a cumbersome, reactive force.

RECOMMENDATION: Establish A.F.T.B./A.F.A.P. as mandated programs, implementing public policy as needed in Army Regulation 608-1.

In-state Tuition Regardless of Duty Station

SCOPE: All military family members should qualify for in-state tuition benefits in
The United States (U.S.) and it's territories, regardless of where the active duty
sponsor is serving. The inherit instability of the military life style often prohibits
military families from being eligible for in-state tuition benefits. This issue
especially impacts military families who are stationed overseas.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Negotiate with states to waive residency requirements for active duty military
   family members.
2. Lobby U.S. congress for support; lobby public universities, state governors and
   legislators for implementation.

Deployment Education for Youth and Support from Community

SCOPE: The military and local school systems do not sufficiently provide
education and support regarding deployment to our youth. The lack of this education
and support has created an environment of additional fear, stress and anxiety for our
military youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Provide and implement age specific out-reach programs to include Soldier/youth
   mentoring programs, youth Army Family Team Building workshops and youth readiness groups.
2. Provide educational assemblies about deployment and military life to staff and student bodies in all schools with a military population.

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Force Support/ Leadership/ Relocation

Rear Detachment Phone Number

SCOPE: There is not a centralized phone number at each installation that families can call to reach rear detachment personnel. The post operator does not always have accurate phone numbers to reach rear detachments, due to redistribution of organizations facilities within the deploying installation. When family members can't contact rear detachment, it increases stress and prevents issues from being resolved at the lowest level.

RECOMMENDATION: Create one easy, permanent toll free phone number (i.e. 1-800-reardet), that connects to a voice automated menu, which connects calls to BN-level rear detachments.

Family Member and Soldier Operational Security (OPSEC) Briefing

SCOPE: Sensitive information is widely available through internet sources from immediate and extended family members of deployed/deploying Soldiers. There is no standardized Army requirement for commanders to address OPSEC with Soldier's families. Family members, local and distant, do not know what they can/can not share regarding operational issues/details, inadvertently releasing sensitive information and placing Soldiers at additional risk.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Require commanders to provide an OPSEC brief once-a-year, and as a part of the mandatory pre-deployment brief to the Family Readiness Group (FRG).
2. Develop other methods to disseminate OPSEC to extended family members (i.e. through local schools, Army Family Team Building (A.F.T.B.), mailings, internet, and OPSEC links to installation websites.

Assignment and Deployment Considerations of Dual Army Couples

SCOPE: Currently, the Army's married couples program is not sufficient. Couples face alternating deployments and increasingly long separations, while others with children find themselves deployed simultaneously. The inflexibility of the current system discourages continuing military service .

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Establish a human resources command proponent that addresses the unique assignment/deployment needs of dual Army couples.
2. Amend the current regulation to require a joint stabilization tour for dual Army couples that is equal to the length of separation due to deployment.

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Benefits/Entitlements/ Housing

Benefits for Global war on Terrorism (GWOT)

SCOPE: Currently there is disparity between global war on terrorism survivor benefits that is determined by date of death. Under the United States Code Section 1009 of Title 37, surviving family members of a Soldier who died before November 2003 do not receive the same benefits as the family of Soldiers who died after 2003. Current law creates emotional and financial hardships for surviving family members.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Amend the law to make all survivor benefits retroactive to September 11, 2001.
2. Ensure all surviving family members are notified of the changes.

Housing for partial custodial single service member

SCOPE: Current housing regulation does not authorize family member housing for Soldiers who have partial custody for less than 181 days a year. This policy may result in: Reduced interaction with parent and child; Increased expense to Soldier during visitations; Limited flexibility of visitation and stability with non-custodial parent. According to the 2004 Army demographic profile, this issue will continue to grow.

RECOMMENDATION: Change Army Regulation 210-50 to allow non-custodial parents the same housing authorization as custodial parents.

Compensation for Non-commissioned Officers

SCOPE: Currently, there is a disparity in pay between Non-Commissioned and Commissioned Officers when considering experience, education, and longevity. The civilian sector rewards its members for these accomplishments. The current pay chart reflects these differences which do not adequately compensate Non-Commissioned Officers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Increase pay over time to decrease the gap.
2. Institute a tiered education incentive bonus.
3. Identify and fund additional pay for Soldiers in senior staff and leadership positions.

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